(5.)

The Great DUTY of Thankfulness.

A SERMON

PREACH'D at

St. Pauls Covent-Garden,

December 2d. 1697.

BEING THE

Day of Thanksgiving

FOR THE

PEACE.

By JOHN HANCOCK, D.D. Chaplain to his Grace the Duke of Bedford.

Publisht at the Request of some of the Parishioners.

LONDON:

Printed for Jonathan Robinson at the Golden Lion in St. Paul's Church-Yard. 1698.

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A

Thanksgiving Sermon

ON

ROM. I. 21.

Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened.

THESE Words, as appears from the Context, were ſpoken by the Apoſtle, of the Antient Heathen. The Apoſtle tells us, that even They had ſo much Knowledge of God, as would render them wholly inexcuſable, while they indulg'd themſelves in their vain Imaginations, and unnatural Luſts; *They knew God, yet they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.* They

knew there was a great and supream Governour, that he was good and bountiful, and the Author of all the good things they enjoy'd; yet they gave him not the Glory of his Goodness; they were unthankful for his Mercies.

And if Unthankfulness were so great a Crime in the Heathen, who had comparatively but a dark Knowledge of God to what we have: How much greater will it be to us, who live under the clear light of the Gospel, who have such clear and full Revelations of God's Nature and Providence, as well as such large Experience of his Goodness?

My Design in speaking from these Words, does not require I should take any further notice of the Context. 'Tis sufficient that the Words as they lye before us, easily afford us this plain Proposition, which I design to lay as the Foundation of my present Discourse.

That Thankfulness to God for his Mercies, is one considerable Part of that Glory that is due to God from us his Creatures: When as the Heathen were unthankful to

God, they did not glorify him as God.

Glorifying God in the ſenſe of the Text, is the ſolemn Acknowledgments we pay to the Excellencies and Perfections (to the real Glory) of the Divine Nature.

The ſolemn Acknowledgments we pay to theſe, are chiefly by Praiſing of him, and by Praying, and Giving Thanks to him. The firſt of theſe, that of Praiſe, reſpects the Excellencies and Perfections of God, as they are in himſelf: The other two reſpect chiefly the Goodneſs and Mercy of God, as extended to us.

There are ſome things, in which this laſt way of glorifying God by an unfeigned Thankfulneſs, ſeems to have the advantage of both the other, and therefore to be more acceptable to God, and neceſſary for us.

This ſeems to be the moſt free and voluntary; there is leaſt of force upon the Spirit of Man in the exercise of it: Let a Man's Diſpoſition as to Religion be what it will, if he do but conſider the mighty Power and Wiſdom declared in the Works of Creation and Providence, he can ſcarce withhold himſelf from admi-

admiring and Praising God. Thus we read that *Galen* could not forbear to do it, when he took notice of the curious Disposition and Use of the Parts of Living Creatures. So 'tis no wonder if Men, when they are in Want and Misery, make their Applications to the Divine Mercy, by earnest Prayer; the Extremity of their Afflictions even forces them to it. But the very occasion of Thankfulness supposes Men under no present necessity of making their Acknowledgments to God. There may be a sort of Selfishness in our Prayers for what we want, but 'tis pure Respect to God that makes us thankfully acknowledge the Goodness of God in what we already have. And therefore we see by sad experience that this is more rarely found than the other. Tho' many that can be importunate enough under their Wants, when things go well with them, are so far from being thankful, that they grow wanton, and abuse the good things that God hath given them to his Dishonour.

And thus it appears that one of the most genuine and acceptible Ways of glorifying

God, is by giving Thanks to him for his Mercies.

In my discoursing on this Subject, I shall enquire,

I. Into the Extent of this Thankfulness.

II. How it ought to be expressed.

III. What Motives should induce us to it.

And where it may be pertinent, I shall consider these things with a special Respect to the Present Occasion.

I. Then in general we ought according to the Apostle's Exhortation, *in every thing to give Thanks*. Thankfulness for what we have, is always requisite to accompany our Prayers for what we want.

But on such Days and Occasions as these, Thanksgiving should make up the best Part of our Devotions: And our Hearts ought now particularly to be tun'd to that chearful Key.

We should especially indeed give Thanks for Spiritual Mercies, saying with the Apostle,

Blessed

Bleſſed be God, and the Father of our Lo Jeſus Chriſt, who hath bleſſed us with all Sp ritual Bleſſings in heavenly places in Chriſt.

But we ſhould not forget his Tempo Favours: Eſpecially when ſuch emergent ca ſions as theſe call ſo loud upon us for o moſt unfeigned Thankfulneſs. When that Go who (that I may uſe the Words of the Pſa miſt, *Pſ.* 29. *ult.*) hath all along this War, *g ven ſtrength* unto us *his People*, hath now length given *us the Bleſſing of Peace.*

Nor ſhould we only give Thanks for o ſelves, but others too. The Apoſtle exh that *Supplications and Prayers, Interceſſio and giving of Thanks, be made for all Men, f Kings, and all that are in Authority.* Meth we cannot but upon this Occaſion congra late the Happineſs of thoſe our Neighbo Nations, whoſe Countries are now delive from being any longer the Seat of this wa War. We have indeed in this our Iſland a kind of continual Peace in the midſt of Wa But 'twas ſad with them. As therefore bef we could not but extend our Pity tow them, now we ought to rejoyce with them

And here likewiſe there is a particular Acknowledgment due to the good Providence of God, which hath ſtill attended His Majeſty, in the midſt of ſo many great and apparent Dangers: But in this we have ſo great and near an Intereſt, that it is indeed to give Thanks for our ſelves.

Again; As Thankfulneſs ſhould be a great Part of the buſineſs of our Lives; ſo extraordinary and remarkable Deliverances require an extraordinary more publick and ſolemn Thankfulneſs. And this is the buſineſs of this Day. The Occaſion of it is very great.

When God hath made Wars to ceaſe in all this our Part of the World: When he hath given us, ſo much beyond the Expectation of ſome of us, an honourable, advantageous, and we hope a laſting Peace: When after all the Toils and Hazards, of this long and tedious War, he hath brought Home our gracious Sovereign, in Safety and with Honour. In a word, now we have, what lately was the utmoſt we could wiſh for, have we not reaſon at this time to give all Religious and decent Teſtimonies of our Joy and Thankfulneſs?

The

The second Thing I proposed to speak u
is, how it ought to be expressed.

And it should appear,

1. By the Esteem we have of God's Me
cies.

2. By our Acknowledgments of the sam

3. By the suitable Returns we make t
them.

1. By the Esteem we have of them.
The Mercies of God are very great i
themselves. They are stiled by the Apost
Rom. 2. *The riches of his Goodness*: But th
will appear much greater if we consider, ho
ill we deserve from God, and how little
we have reason to expect from him.
When therefore we actually disesteem h
Mercies, or when we interpretatively do i
by carrying our selves so under them, as sho
we make light of 'em, then we offer an hi
Affront to God, and bring great guilt upo
our selves.

I wish there were none among us, th
were guilty of dis-esteeming and despis

the Mercy of this Day. Too many I fear there are who were too ready to rejoyce in the Succeſs of our Enemies, if not to ſide with them. And now we have a Peace, they ſcarce think it a Bleſſing, and are ſo far from rejoycing in it, that they rather grumble at it. They are ſo enamour'd on ſome Schemes they have formed to themſelves, that they ſeem to have forgotten the Duty they owe to the Publick Welfare of their Country.

2. Another Sign of a Thankful Heart, is a due Acknowledgment of God's Mercies.

This requires that we ſhould look upon 'em as coming from the hand of God. The Atheiſt that denies the Being of God, or the Epicurean that denies his Providence, as if it were below him to trouble himſelf with this lower World, will never pay this Debt of Thankfulneſs. Thoſe are likewiſe here to blame, that look ſo much at the Means and Inſtruments, that they forget God, the Author of Publick Bleſſings. We read of ſome that (as the Prophet ſpeaks) ſacrificed to their own Nets, and burnt Incenſe to their own Drags. We are too apt to do ſomething like it, when we

ſo much vaunt of the Strength of our Navy, and the Valour of our Engliſh Souldiers.

Thoſe that on this Occaſion, have ſo bravely defended their Native Country, may they have all due Honour both of Eſteem and Requital, and may their Names be had in everlaſting Remembrance.

And particularly there is a very great Acknowledgment due to the Courage and Conduct of our Gracious Soveraign, the great Inſtrument of this happy Peace. When he hath the Publick Teſtimony of all *Europe*, if we for whom more immediately, he hath ſo long, and ſo often ſacrificed his Eaſe, and expoſed his Perſon; if we, I ſay, are behind others in our Acknowledgments, we are wretchedly ungrateful.

But ſtill as our Gracious Soveraign in His Royal Proclamation, for the keeping of this Day, adores the Divine Providence and Goodneſs, in bringing to paſs this honourable Peace, ſo ſhould we from his Example learn to do ſo. And the Reſult of all our Thoughts in this caſe ſhould be a grateful Acknowledgment of the Divine Goodneſs

And

And 'tis well done, that we are come here this Day to tell the World, we own our ſelves beholding to God for this Mercy.

3. Another Effect and Sign of Thankfulneſs, is a grateful Return to God for his Mercy.

'Tis true, all our Goodneſs extends not to him: He is not the better for any thing we can do for him, or give to him. But yet there is a kind of Requital to be made to God for his Mercies: *What* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) *ſhall I render unto the Lord for all his Mercies?*

It becomes us of theſe Nations therefore to think what we ought to do for God, who hath done ſo much for us. O that the Senſe we have of God's Mercies might appear in the Goodneſs of our Lives! That the bleſſed Effect of this Peace might be a general Repentance and Reformation. Let it never be ſaid the better God is to us, the worſe we are to him. When we have Peace on Earth, let us not by our bold Impieties, proclaim War againſt Heaven. When he hath made our Enemies to be at Peace with us, let not us be at Enmity with him.

If this be all the fruit of the Peace, 'tis not like to last long. If we break the Peace with God, we cannot keep it long with Men. God will never want ways to punish us, if we prevent not the Sentence, by a true and timely Reformation.

I have now done with the second Thing, the Effects or Expressions of true Thankfulness.

The Third general is the Motives that should induce us to the Exercise of this Duty of Thankfulness.

And first we may consider the Excellency of this Duty. The Text tells us, 'tis a Part of that Honour we owe to God: And consequently our neglect thereof is a great Slight of the Divine Majesty. *When they knew God*, (saith the Apostle of the Heathens) *they glorified him not as God.* And God testified his Resentment of this their Ingratitude, by giving them up to the most stupid Blindness. Their Unthankfulness to God, (as the Context tells us) made him give them up to their own Imaginations. May not our Unthankfulness for these Publick Mercies justly yet provoke God to give us up to the Will of our

Ene-

Enemies; for certainly it muſt be a much greater fault in us, than it was in them.

However 'tis no ſmall Inducement to this Duty, that 'tis one of the moſt acceptable Sacrifices we can preſent to God. You may ſee this in the 50th. Pſalm throughout: *I will not* (ſaith God there to *Iſrael*) *reprove thee becauſe of thy Sacrifices, nor for thy Burnt-offerings, becauſe they were not always before me.* And after ſeveral Verſes to that purpoſe, it follows: *Offer unto God Thanksgiving, and pay thy Vows unto the moſt High, and call upon me in the day of trouble: So will I hear thee, and thou ſhalt glorifie me.* And in the laſt Verſe of the ſame Pſalm, *Whoſo offers me Thanks and Praiſe, he honoureth me.*

So that when we withhold from God our Thankfulneſs, we rob him of his Honour, a thing he is above all other jealous of. And if we do ſo, he will pay us in our own coin, *Them that honour* him he *will honour*, and *they that deſpiſe him ſhall be as lightly eſteemed.*

2. Let us conſider the Equity of this Duty of Thankfulneſs.

Common Senſe teaches us Gratitude to our Benefactors. Thoſe that have no Senſe of this

this, are justly look'd on by all, as the worst Men. If we call a Man ungrateful, we call him all that's bad at once.

If this be a Duty we owe to Men, it's much more due to God. It's impossible we should be so much obliged to any Man in the World as we are to him. There is none that hath been so much disobliged by us, and yet there is none that hath done so much for us.

And if this be a just debt for private Benefits, how much more is it so for his publick Mercies? The vast Multitude that share in these publick Deliverances, lays a new Obligation on every particular Man to a grateful Acknowledgment of God's Favours. There is scarce the meanest Creature, but will partake of the fruits of this Happy Peace: And therefore there is none below the Obligation to exercise this Duty of Thankfulness.

3. Another thing that ought to enhance the rate of God's Mercies in our Esteem, and make us the more thankful for them, is the Reflection upon our Misery when we were in want of them.

There is nothing that so truly teaches us the Worth of things, as the Want of them.

The

The full Soul (ſaith *Solomon*) *loaths the Honey-comb; but to the hungry Soul every bitter thing is ſweet.* Thoſe that have long ſmarted under the Hardſhips of War, ſhould in reaſon value the Reſt and Eaſe of Peace. We that have been ſo importunate in our Prayers, ſhould be no leſs ſolemn and devout in our Thankſgivings for it.

How reſtleſs and impatient, a while ago, were the Wiſhes of moſt of us for a Peace? How extreamly ſenſible were we of the Miſeries of the War? What mighty Complaints of the burthen of Taxes, of the Dearth of Proviſions, of the Decay of Trade?

Now we have what we then ſo much wiſht for. We hope in ſome time our Burthens will be eaſed, and Trade will flouriſh; and things go better with us.

But ſhall we under theſe Circumſtances, be querulous and uneaſie? Shall we again grow careleſs and negligent? Shall we take the Peace, and enjoy the fruits of it, and never look up to the hand that gives it?

4. The pleaſure we ſhall find in the Exerciſe of this Duty, is enough to ingage us to it. *A pleaſant and a joyful thing it is* (ſaith the Pſalmiſt) *to be thankful.* We looſe much of the

Sweet-

Sweetneſs of the good things we have, when we are unthankful for them.

Peace is a mighty Bleſſing, eſpecially after the Hardſhips and Hazards of ſo long a War: And therefore we of theſe Nations have the greater reaſon to be truly thankful for it. But our very Thankfulneſs for it will ſo heighten our Gust and Reliſh of it, as will much increaſe the Bleſſing. I doubt not 'tis true of all the things of the World, the trueſt Enjoyment we can have of them, and the higheſt pleaſure we can find in them, is with a thankful Heart to look up to God the Giver of them. They may be ſweet and pleaſant in themſelves, but will have a much better Reliſh when we taſte 'em, as the Effects of God's Bounty. And this is the fourth thing, the Pleaſure we ſhall find in the Exerciſe of this Duty of Thankfulneſs.

5. I will add but one thing more by way of Motive, and that is, it is highly our Intereſt to be thankful. Thanks is the moſt prevailing way of begging: To be grateful to God for his former Mercies, is the ſureſt way to engage him to continue and encreaſe them to us.

That Tenant that refuſes to pay a ſmall Quit-rent for a great Eſtate, well deſerves to

turn

turn'd out of all. This Thankfulneſs, and the ſeaſonable Conſequents of it, are the Subſtance of what God expects, or we can give, in return for his Mercies. And 'tis but a ſmall Acknowledgment this, that he expects, for ſo many, and ſuch mighty Favours.

Let us of theſe Nations, think our ſelves obliged in Intereſt, as well as Duty, to make this return for that Publick Peace he now reſtores to us. In ſhort, now we have a Peace, if we have a mind to keep it, let us be thankful for it.

But I will not inſiſt longer on theſe things, nor detain you too long from other decent Demonſtrations of your Joy and Thankfulneſs.

Give me leave to cloſe this my Diſcourſe with a ſhort Advice to all Ranks and Degrees of Men.

There is a Duty we owe to God the Author of this Peace.

There is a Duty we owe to the King, the great Inſtrument of it.

There is a Duty we owe to the Publick, and therein to our ſelves.

To God.

Let us admire and adore his Mercy, that he hath not given us over to the Will of our Enemies. That he hath in the midſt of Judgment,

bred Mercy. That he hath used so much Patience and Long-suffering, to such a provoking People. That he hath tried once again those milder Methods of Grace and Mercy to us.

Now he hath renewed his Mercies to us, let us renew our Obedience to him. Now he hath *delivered us from our Enemies, so that we may serve him without fear*; let us do it *in Holiness and Righteousness all the days of our Lives*. As our Saviour advises the Man in the Gospel, let us *go away and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto us*.

2. There is a Duty we owe to the King, the great Instrument of this Peace.

I speak not now of those common Duties we owe, as good Subjects, to our rightful Soveraign. But I mean such Returns as Gratitude will oblige us to make to him, who is under God, our great Benefactor.

Let us in our several Stations so behave our selves, that the Crown may sit light and easie on his Head. That he as well as we, may find a difference between the Hardships of War, and the Quiet and Ease of Peace. That he may never have cause to repent, the Toils and Hazards to which he has expos'd himself to procure the Peace of a restless and unquiet People.

3.

3. There is a Duty we owe to the Publick, and therein to our ſelves.

To mind the things that make for Peace, to lay aſide all our Animoſities, to be all of one mind, at leaſt ſo far as to join together in promoting and preſerving the Publick Peace. I believe moſt ſober Men will think that a legal Eſtabliſhment is the beſt and firmeſt Bond of Union, in the Church as well as State. And that it is ſo agreeable to the Will of God, there ſhould be ſuch a one in a Chriſtian Nation, that an honeſt Chriſtian, that lives under it, ſhould not depart from it, unleſs he be very ſure he cannot join with it, without Sin.

But if we cannot all exactly agree in our Judgments, thoſe of us that are ſincere on all ſides, ſhould take care there may be as little diſtance as poſſible in our Affections. That our Contentions about Truth, may not be managed to the Prejudice of Peace, ſo as to hinder the Performance of thoſe mutual Duties we owe as Men and Chriſtians, to one another. But above all, that our Differences in the Church, may not embroil the State.

How happy were it could we at laſt ſee all factious Sidings both in Church and State, buried

in perpetual Oblivion; That since the generality of us are united under the Present Government, and equally pretend to Loyalty to our Present Gracious Soveraign, and hope the Government will be settled in a Lasting Peace, we might lay aside all odious Names of distinction, and forget all former Feuds and Animosities, and our great Contention hence forward be how we may outdo each other in acting for the Publick Welfare.

But above all let Gratitude oblige us all to a real and thorough Reformation, the End of all God's Mercies to us, is to bring us to Obedience unto him. *Rom.* 2. *The Goodness of God leadeth us to Repentance:* And if we be not led by it, God will interpret it as the Apostle there tells us, as *a despising the riches of his Goodness.*

This is the only way to make the Peace lasting and durable.

There are three Things very necessary to be done by every one of us, if we would promote the Peace and Welfare of the Nation.

1. That every one of us take care in the first place to reform our selves. That publick Reformation that is so necessary to the Establishment of our Peace and Happiness, begin at particular Persons. 'Tis easie to observe some Men making

grievous

grievous Complaints of the Evil of the Times, and zealous Invectives againſt the Sins of others, while they are negligent enough in reforming their own, and are guilty of as bad, or worſe themſelves. We may ſay to them as the Apoſtle does, *Rom.* 2. *Thou art inexcuſable, O Man, whoever thou art that judgeſt another, for wherein thou judgeſt another thou condemneſt thy ſelf; for thou that judgeſt doſt the ſame things.*

But it is the part of an honeſt Chriſtian to be moſt ſevere in judging, and moſt forward in reforming of himſelf. He firſt caſts the Beam out of his own Eye, before he pretends to take the Mote out of his Brother's Eye.

2. And yet we muſt not neglect in our Sphere and Station to promote the Reformation of others too. We muſt not ſay with *Cain, Am I my Brother's Keeper?* 'Tis Charity to the Publick, as well as to our Brother, not to ſuffer Sin upon, when we may be inſtrumental to reclaim him.

This is a Work more or leſs incumbent on every one of us. There is none of us ſo mean, but we may be more or leſs inſtrumental to the promoting of a general Reformation. If we have no Power and Authority, yet at leaſt by our Advice or Admonition we may do ſomething to make the World better.

But

But this Work of Promoting Reformation, especially incumbent on those in Authority in Church and State. And we would willingly hope the Government will now be at leasure, to draw the Sword of Justice, against those worst Enemies of the State, the reigning Vices and Debauchery of the Times.

But if this should not be done so effectually as it ought to be, 'tis no great wonder: For we find those very good Laws, that have been made for the Discouragement of Prophaneness, have had but little effect, for want of a due and zealous Execution of them.

I would therefore apply my self to you that are Parents and Masters of Families, that you would at least do what in you lies, to promote the Reformation of those under your Charge. This you ought to do, not only by your good Advice and Instruction, but by your Power and Authority too.

For you must know, that God hath not only made you Priests in your own Families, to pray for 'em and with 'em, and to instruct 'em in their Duty, but a kind of Kings too to keep and constrain 'em to it. *I know* Abraham, (saith God of that Pious Patriarch) *that he will command his* Children

Children, and they shall keep the Way of the Lord. When Parents and Masters not only instruct and advise, but with that Authority that God hath given 'em, *command their Children and Servants*, 'tis likely *they will keep the Way of the Lord.*

And certainly Parents and Masters, could they be made sensible of their Duty in this case, might do much towards a general Reformation, by beginning and carrying it on, in their Families, those little Kingdoms.

And the doing of this, as it would have a mighty influence towards the Publick Good, so 'tis of no less Importance to themselves. I fear the true cause of the ruin of thousands of Families, is the negligence of the Governours thereof. In vain do Men toil and drudge to heap up great Estates for their Children, while they are so very negligent in the Instruction and Education of them. Nay, I doubt the want of this, often provokes God to blast their Hopes all other ways.

A sad Instance we have in the Family of one that was otherwise a very good Man, that of Old Eli. We read that God denounced the utter ruine of his whole Family; and the reason given is, because his *Sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*

But

3. But if after all that we can do, the W[illegible] not be amended, there is one thing still [illegible] bent on the Pious Christian: Not to be [illegible] concern'd Spectator of the Vices of the [illegible]

We read of *Jeremy*, that he mourn[illegible] cret for the Pride and Stubborness of [illegible] ple; Of *David*, that Rivers of Wa[illegible] down his Eyes, because Men kept not Go[illegible] Of *Lot*, that his righteous Soul was vex[illegible] the filthy Conversation of the Wicked.

If there were more of these Mourne[illegible] our *Zion*, we might hope, as God wo[illegible] spar'd *Sodom*, if he had found but ten [illegible] Persons in it; That even for their [illegible] might yet a while, prolong the Peace [illegible] quility of these otherwise sinful Natio[illegible]

Well, God is at present dealing with [illegible] good Husband-man with the fruitless [illegible] He lets our Mine a little longer. May he [illegible] Wisdom, in this our Day of Peace, to [illegible] and put in practice, to God, the Gov[illegible] and among our selves, the things that a[illegible] quisite to the Establishment of it, and [illegible] never be hid from our Eyes.

Now to the God of Peace be all Honour [illegible] now and for evermore. Amen.

FINIS.